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Emily Forsberg Bouts
St. Cloud State University

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**Women Love Horror, Too: Film Adaptation of *Pet Sematary* Suggests Why More
Women Should Get a Chance to Scare Us**

by

Emily Forsberg Bouts

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Thesis Committee:
Judith Dorn, Chairperson
Judith Kilborn
Bradley Chisholm

Abstract

For decades, feminist scholars have analyzed horror movies. It is a tempting area of popular culture to examine from a gender studies perspective, given the level of violence shown toward women, as well as the sexualization of women. Many feminist theorists come to conclusions suggesting horror movies are dangerous to how society depicts women and gender dynamics overall. Another similarity among the enduring feminist theories is that they rely heavily on psychodynamic theories when performing close-readings of horror films.

I am an educated woman who loves horror movies and doesn't feel worse off for it. I argue that viewers are conscious of the gender dynamics and rhetorical strategies occurring on screen and, therefore, not a group that is at-risk of losing their sense of right and wrong. Through applying a close-reading of horror movies that doesn't rely on psychodynamic theories or the assumption that viewers aren't aware of gender themes and rhetorical strategy, I suggest that horror movies aren't a societal problem. Still, there is a gender problem within the horror movie industry that poses a risk to society.

Studies show that women are often the majority makeup of a horror movie audience. Within the movie industry overall, there are few female directors, and within the feminist scholarship of horror films, there is little to address how women love horror and how society would have something to gain if more narratives of female horror made it to the screen. That perceived gap within the feminist discussion of horror films inspired me to focus specifically on an American horror movie directed by a woman.

Mary Lambert directed the adaptation of Stephen King's book, *Pet Sematary*. I applied Cynthia A. Freeland's cognitivist/feminist approach to my close-reading of the movie

to show what rhetorical strategies as well as narrative differences stand out within a woman's work in directing a horror movie. Lambert's work suggests there is a rich emotional dynamic within her horror direction that makes for a viewing experience of extremes: terror, disgust, sadness, and comedy. Her work also serves as a reminder of industry limitations women face, limitations that are currently being challenged at growingly public, even legal levels.

Horror isn't anti-woman; women consume and find value in the supposedly taboo genre. It is time to see more women directing the movies that scare us, not just in the theater seats. Lambert's work is an example of why.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I. Introduction	5
II. Popular Theories of Horror	10
Enduring Feminist Theories Regarding Horror	12
III. Freeland's Cognitivist/Feminist Method	16
Lines of Questioning for Analyzing <i>Pet Sematary</i>	19
Plot	20
Technical Direction	20
IV. A Breakdown of <i>Pet Sematary</i>	22
V. Applying Freeland's Framework to <i>Pet Sematary</i>	25
Freeland's Plot-Related Questions	25
Freeland's Questions of Technical Direction	40
Portraits	48
Trucks	53
VI. Overall Impact of Lambert's Direction	60
VII. Implications, Limitations of the Study, and Signs of Change	68
Works Cited	76

Chapter I: Introduction

The presentation of stories through film carries with it a great power to impact an audience. The average person on the street may more likely be able to tell you the last movie they saw or their favorite film before they could recall a favorite or recently-read book. Movies have a powerful effect on viewers and culture overall. That power, unfortunately, is not equally bestowed upon women to exercise behind the camera. Research shows a stark difference between the numbers of films directed by women versus men. According to a study by the Sundance Institute and a group called Women in Film, between 2002 and 2012 fewer than 4 percent of the top 100 movies released in the U.S. were directed by women (Dargis “Lights, Camera, Taking Action”). That inequality is a problem in itself. When you constrict the pool of movies down to the specific genre of horror, the disparity in female versus male movie direction remains scary at the very least.

Why narrow this conversation down to the genre of horror movies? Horror can have an especially strong impact on viewers, and due to the extreme, often violent nature of the genre, people usually either love or hate it. It is such an extreme genre that those who enjoy horror movies are often asked, “Why?” A woman who enjoys watching scary movies might face even more surprise and raised eyebrows if her movie collection contains R-rated slasher and ghost stories. And what of a woman who wants to direct a horror movie? A female director from Australia, Jennifer Kent, has achieved acclaim this year for her horror movie, *The Babadook*. She admits that her social circle was turned off by the fact that she was creating a horror movie (O’Sullivan). The reaction of Kent’s peers and of society in general regarding women who enjoy horror might be the result of the common opinion or theory that

horror films portray women as mere meat to be killed or sexualized. The portrayals of gender within the genre have ignited feminist debate and study.

A number of film and feminist studies scholars, as is discussed in Chapter II of this project, have analyzed horror films and contributed to the long-held gender-related idea that the horror genre is dangerous to societal beliefs. They generally have come to different yet similar conclusions in that they suggest horror movies have consistently portrayed problematic messages regarding women and gender relations in society. Considering that historical perspective on the genre, one would think that more scholarly research would suggest the potential importance of female directors contributing to the horror depictions that hit the movie screens. That is what I do with this project. By taking one of very few American horror films directed by a woman, I aim to show that the genre (and its audience) would benefit by putting more female directors at the helm.

Chapter II of this project addresses a few of the most esteemed and popular theories related to feminist readings of horror films as well as the definition of horror. It sets up the horror genre and horror movies more specifically as having a rich history worthy of scholarly analysis and social criticism. In Chapter III, I delineate film and feminist scholar Cynthia A. Freeland's method of analyzing a horror film for gender messages to show where her suggested research method differs from scholars before her. Freeland analyzes various specifics in horror films, and this project follows her lead in its close-reading of the movie *Pet Sematary*. This film makes for a rich opportunity for research because it was directed by a woman, Mary Lambert.

I could have used various feminist scholars' methods of reading a horror film to analyze Lambert's work. Because I believe that horror viewers engage a high level of conscious thought and contemplation while viewing horror movies and after viewing them, however, I choose to align my work with the methods of Cynthia A. Freeland, who shares that opinion. She differs from many other influential theorists because of her argument that gender messages within horror are not primarily bound within the unconscious realm of thought. She takes the analysis of horror movies away from psychoanalytical questions and toward more tangible questions with tangible answers that one can apply to dissecting the direction of a film. Surprisingly, Freeland hasn't yet applied her lens to a female-directed horror movie. This project does that in its use of *Pet Sematary* as its focus of study.

Chapter IV presents *Pet Sematary* as the research artifact in this project and outlines the general plot of Stephen King's original story. That overview is followed by the close-reading of Lambert's movie adaptation versus the book in Chapter V, which discusses the differences and strategies that Lambert utilized in her direction. That thorough analysis is followed by a chapter summarizing the overall impact of Lambert's choices on the response of the audience and what they learn through the portrayed evil within her movie narrative. The differences and emphases found in the film's direction compared to the book are the areas of interest for the purpose of this study. Those standouts and Lambert's strategy in directing would theoretically serve as points to support the idea that there is value in what a woman offers as a director of horror.

A question of empowerment is valuable to this project because many would assume that an intelligent, successful woman who is given the chance to play in an otherwise male-

dominated business such as the horror film industry would take advantage of the opportunity from a social commentary perspective. By that, I mean, given the popular feminist critiques of the horror genre, where women are victims in slasher films or monsters, would Lambert want to help show a more empowering, feminist message? Would she use her chance at directing a best-selling author's book-turned-movie to do that?

In her direction of *Pet Sematary*, Lambert shows how a female director successfully tells a horror story through a strong sense of visual and audible extremes. Her work in presenting the happy and beautiful against the tragic and gruesome creates an emotional response for the viewer. That response is broader than fear; it also includes sadness, sympathy and/or empathy, and even laughter. Lambert's work experience in the pop culture world wherein she directed Madonna's music videos equipped her to make even a traumatic, though fictional story, like *Pet Sematary*, more easily consumable by the masses. She did so in her use of humor, casting, music, and her presentation of the story's evil as a possible predator of us all. Therefore, while the movie itself doesn't show a female character's triumph over patriarchal dominance, the female director's success at creating an emotionally rich and entertaining movie serves as an example of why it is important for producers to inject more diversity behind the camera.

While I have been completing this project, notable conversations about women's roles and representation within the film industry are taking place and in popular view within news media outlets. In the concluding portion of this piece, I will weave together the lessons revealed by my research and how they may fit with some of the current calls for action, signs of progressive promise, and attitudes within the movie and horror movie industry. The

implications of my study, based on the coverage of current events recently, will probably be seen put into action in the near future. How exciting it is to sense that a problem that inspired this study will hopefully be less of one in my lifetime.

Chapter II: Popular Theories of Horror

The horror movie industry provides various types of horror films. Some of the obvious types revolve around monsters, supernatural entities (ghosts), and slasher stories. Film studies scholars such as Noel Carroll note that science fiction also can often fall into the horror genre (or the horror genre into science fiction). A more consistent, universal way to define the horror genre, suggests Carroll, is to look at how a work of art is intended to affect its audience. “The cross-art, cross-media genre of horror takes its title from the emotion it characteristically or rather ideally promotes; this emotion constitutes the identifying mark of horror” (Carroll 14). A story, therefore, that sets out to elicit the physical and mental responses to horror (rapid heartbeat, shrinking in one’s seat, sweaty palms, jumpiness, etc.) fits within the genre.

Horror cannot just be reduced to narratives involving monsters, ghosts and blood, though those aspects fit into the above-mentioned categories. A fairy tale usually has monsters in it; it is not usually a horror story. Casper is a ghost—a friendly ghost; he is not a horrific creature. A war story will have bloody scenes; it is not a slasher movie. As Carroll suggests, a horror narrative is meant to frighten its audience, and the audience’s fearful reaction is supposed to match the fearful reactions of positive characters within the story. As I discuss horror, I am working based on that most general definition. Since I am going to focus on Freeland’s approach to analyzing horror, I will also adopt the idea that it is the notion of evil, not monsters, on which it is important to dwell when contemplating a horror narrative (*The Naked and Undead*).

Researchers of various scholarly backgrounds have analyzed the genre of horror, both in literary as well as movie forms. Horror films have been particularly appealing subjects for

feminist analysis due to the common presence of female victims in oftentimes bloody scenes. Or, take for example, *Carrie* and *The Exorcist*. Women take on supernatural powers and monstrous behaviors. Women in horror movies tend to be either hyper-sexualized, brutally attacked, or monsters themselves. Those depictions make critical analysis of the genre socially important. What is society learning or being told about women when they consume a slasher film, for example? Is that message hurtful in its view toward women, men, and gender relationships? In the same breath, we should ask what society is being told about men and their roles in society/family.

Women speaking for themselves is important for providing a well-rounded, more honest picture of what women feel, need, deserve, and what they are, could be, and can do. When the horror movie genre lacks female directors, my theory is that it lacks potentially empowering representations and messages for women and society overall. What might that narrative look like and say? Feminist scholars employ their power by dissecting the horror films consumed by the masses, very often finding what they see as the hidden (and sometimes not so hidden) damaging messages about women's roles in society. By recognizing the alleged negative messages within the films, the scholars engage in a culturally important process.

It is important to give at least a brief background of some of the popular feminist theories related to horror films to show that there is feminist scholarship on this matter and an attitude that empowering gendered messages in horror are lacking. I will present some research, providing examples of reading frameworks and supposed gender messages found

within the horror genre. Then, I will present the reading framework that appeals to me, a cognitivist/feminist approach that Freeland suggests.

Enduring Feminist Theories Regarding Horror

Laura Mulvey (1975): Mulvey employs psychoanalysis in her work with films. Her notable essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 1975, focuses on the unconscious reasons why viewers find pleasure in films. She is well-known for the idea of the “male gaze,” which basically assumes that men are the watchers and women are the subjects of the gaze. Men control how women are represented because they are behind the cameras and they are the market, the watchers. Woman is the “bearer of meaning, not the creator of meaning.” Mulvey suggests that there are two ways to look at a woman in the cinematic medium: a “sadistic-voyeuristic look” (woman is punished for her lack of a penis) and a “fetishistic-scopophilic look” (woman is there just to be gazed at sexually). Clearly, Mulvey’s theory is complex, but what is valuable in her work is that she believes cinema is powerful and is a medium with which women are represented only through the gaze of a man (Grant 298-300).

Linda Williams (1983): Williams’ argument about female representation in the horror genre relies on Mulvey’s theory about the “male gaze.” She extends that conversation, adding to it her notable theory: If a woman gazes at the monster, tries to investigate it, desires it, or basically plays an active role, she is punished. Williams adds to her essay and to the larger feminist studies of horror that sometimes the woman’s look at the monster is recognition of similarities between the monster and woman. It is an unconscious recognition of “their similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing” (Grant 18).

Carol Clover (1992): Clover goes into depth about the horror genre with her book *Men Women and Chainsaws*. A brief but stand-out statement about her feminist theory regarding the genre is that a male viewer doesn't necessarily relate or sympathize only with a male character. Men and women all tend to sympathize and see themselves represented by the surviving victim/hero. In many cases of horror films, that survivor is, as Clover tags her, "The Final Girl." Clover's spin on the genre presents a possible positive role of the films. Men have an opportunity to connect with what it is like to be the woman, terrorized in the film. Still, as another film critic points out about Clover's theory, that "victim-identified" mode of watching means that those who were enjoying the horror on-screen are engaging in a form of masochism. She argues that during the 80s, an unconscious desire for self-punishment stemmed from a phenomenon of "gender confusion" (Totaro 1).

Barbara Creed (1993): In *The Monstrous Feminine*, Creed focuses on women in horror films as the monsters – not the victims. She presents the following as the popular categories of female monsters in film: the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the witch, the vampire, and the possessed woman. In her work she also employs Freudian, psychoanalytical concepts. She says that the female monster's gender is crucial with regard to "the construction of her monstrosity" (Creed 3). The representation of women as monsters might be seen as feminist, by putting a powerful woman on screen. But Creed asserts that the purpose of her research is to show that the monstrous-feminine representations are representations of "male fears" (7). Basically, that female monster on-screen is what happens when a woman is given power, according to Creed.

As the synopses of the scholars' theories show, feminist studies of horror have largely relied upon psychoanalysis. While many people might not know a lot about psychoanalysis, they at least have heard of Sigmund Freud, who is the founder of the complex psychoanalytical treatments and mode of thought. The basic idea of the "science" is that by becoming conscious of the unconscious thoughts, a person can gain insight about his or her life, needs and wants. They can consciously address matters that they have repressed into their subconscious.

When scholars apply psychoanalysis to horror movies, they attempt to uncover the unconscious ideologies, desires, or fears that the monsters, villains, or general horror in a story represent. Feminist scholars have applied this psychoanalytical lens and come up with various common representations of women within the genre. These readings of the horror films can either teach an empowering feminist message or not, but they tend to show women as the weak victim or represent the monstrous-feminine as powerful—but unconsciously feared. Women are the "other" who are commonly portrayed in horror as pawns of the male gaze.

Of course, Mulvey's, Clover's, Creed's, and Williams' ideas that stem from the psychoanalytical mode of reading are essentially opinions. Their respective theories are those theorists' ways of reading horror movies, and there are other ways to look at movies and what they might imply about society. While I do not doubt that the feminists scholars' readings have good intentions behind them, their work can make a woman feel wrong about liking horror movies. The theories imply that viewers are victims to a movie and its hidden message. Because such readings have left me personally feeling isolated, I am attracted to Freeland's

approach of analysis and her reasons for it. She argues that many viewers of the horror genre, especially feminist viewers, “see through” the supposed messages of “traditional patriarchal dominance relations” (*The Naked and Undead* 17). The audience doesn’t need to be enlightened through psychoanalytical methods. They are already dissecting the movie to discover its meaning and power over them, and that is possible without understanding Freudian thought. It is possible through Freeland’s framework, too.

Chapter III: Freeland's Cognitivist/Feminist Method

My interest in discussing horror does not dwell on unconscious thoughts and feelings. I realize that this goes against scholars' status quo of analyzing horror. In reading Freeland's essay entitled "Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films," I connect with the idea that popular feminist approaches to watching horror rely too heavily and unnecessarily on psychodynamic theories. In her essay, Freeland notes multiple objections to the status quo of psychoanalyzing horror for feminist studies purposes:

- 1) Psychoanalysis is not a proven science like other areas of science. Ignoring critiques about psychoanalysis leads to some feminist theorists' tendency to ignore that applying a popular feminist-minded psychoanalytical theory to every horror movie wouldn't make sense.
- 2) Those who rely on psychoanalyzing horror films tend to focus on the same theories. Freeland asks, "...why settle on these?" Other theories in the field could be utilized when reading or watching narratives. They might not be any better, but why assume that they would be any worse lenses with which to analyze the gender aspects and feminist messages of a story?
- 3) Overall, psychodynamic theories are "reductive" in regards to film analysis. Freeland argues that theorists tend to ignore or overlook aspects of a film that might draw away from their psychoanalysis-based readings of the film. Are there other representations within the story or filmwork (direction, camerawork, design, sound, etc.) that the theorist is ignoring by focusing so specifically on, for

example, the common “primal mother or fear of castration” readings found within feminist critiques of the horror genre?

- 4) Reading movies based on believed male and female differences is another trap that Freeland wants to avoid in reading horror films:

To make very broad generalizations about ‘male’ or ‘female’ viewers blocks the recognition of significant individual differences among viewers that surely affect how they experience films. These include significant differences of social class, sexual orientation, age, race, and so on. (“Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films” 748)

In her essay, Freeland sets up what she believes is a valuable framework, not a theory, with which to read a horror film. She sets up questions that, based on watching a movie, anyone could answer and support with visual or audible evidence. It is more of a study of rhetoric rather than psychology. That varies from popular reliance on digging up the unconscious thoughts at play in the movie.

The aspect of evil is another important component of Freeland’s suggested method of dissecting horror films and one that differentiates her framework from other feminist and film studies theories. She believes that evil, not monsters, is the consistent basis of a horror film, and consumers of the genre engage with horror in order to face their fears and contemplate issues regarding good, evil, death, morals, faith, and more. The portrayal of evil represents the broader message of the movie – the fear that the narrative tries to tap into (*The Naked and the Undead 2*). A monster is not just there to make a viewer scream. Analyzing the evil is an opportunity to contemplate the morals of society and of oneself, including gender standards and views of sexuality. This opportunity to contemplate such important matters, various

horror film scholars (and fans) say, is why the horror genre is artistically valuable and worth scholarly analysis rather than rolled eyes and the quick dismissal that it is garbage.

Due to her focus on the rhetorical strategies of a film and its impact on the audience, Freeland's framework stands out to me as a valid, relevant lens with which to analyze a woman's adaptation of *Pet Sematary* for this project. Before I go further in discussing my focus on that story, let me outline Freeland's proposed framework more clearly. Then, I will lay out the way in which I will attempt to apply her suggestions specifically to my analysis of Lambert's film adaptation of *Pet Sematary*.

Horror is a genre encompassing various subgenres and that has a rich history, so Freeland thinks that "a promising feminist approach to cinematic horror should be historically aware and also broad and open enough to work for all these varieties of horror." The following is Freeland's theory behind her suggested framework:

...we must shift attention away from the psychodynamics of viewing movies, and onto the nature of films as artifacts that may be studied by examining both their construction and their role in culture. To study their construction we look at such standard features as plot, characters, and point of view. To study their role in culture—that is to inquire about this as feminists—we examine their gender ideology. This is my chief goal in producing feminist readings of horror films. ("Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films" 752)

Freeland's framework poses specific questions that can identify the rhetorical tools and effects of a film. Rhetoric can be effective (or ineffective) not just based on the written words/story, but also the way in which the content is presented. For example, does the visual point of view impact the message of a movie? Does a lighting choice make a difference in the message or feeling?

Therefore, I pose questions about the movie related to plot and its representation of gender, but I also look at the directorial choices that Lambert employed to bring Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* to life on-screen. Her direction and work in visually presenting the horror narrative plays into Freeland's framework more so than the book does. Freeland is highly focused on how the technical aspects of the film-making and the visual representations of evil or horror overall might reveal a feminist or societal ideology. Compared to Freeland's analyses of various horror movies, this research of the movie *Pet Sematary* goes a step further because it looks at a female director's work. The films that Freeland herself dissects in her academic works, such as *The Fly*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Repulsion*, for examples, are all directed by men. Could it be that a man's film-making choices might be motivated by a different gender ideology than a woman's, or at least reveal a different gender ideology? This gets to the origin of my research thus far – the question about whether it is important for a so-called female narrative of horror to appear in films. Analyzing Lambert's adaptation of *Pet Sematary* using Freeland's tools is a step toward answering that bigger question. Did Lambert contribute something valuable to her audience and society?

Lines of Questioning for Analyzing *Pet Sematary*

Based on my research of Freeland, the following are the questions to apply to the analysis of *Pet Sematary*. The questions fall under two general categories. Some of them are related to the story-telling and plot; the others are related to the technical aspects of the film-making and direction:

Plot

- 1) **Gender Ideologies:** How are the women in the narrative portrayed? Are they targets of torture? Are they independent? Do they help move the plot line along, or are they just there to look at? How are the men portrayed in the film? Overall, how does the theory of patriarchal dominance play out in this film (*The Naked and the Undead 4*)?
- 2) **Evil:** What is the evil really at play here? What source of evil is the spectator faced with when engaging with this particular horror story or film? The way evil is depicted on the screen, according to Freeland, can tell more about what is the message in the story than the actual storyline (*The Naked and the Undead 4*).

Technical Direction

Freeland includes an analysis of the movie *The Shining* in her book *The Naked and the Undead*, pages 215-240. Since she too was looking at another person's direction of a King story, I allowed that essay to guide me to pose the following questions related specifically to director choices:

- 1) **Camera:** Who does it feel like is watching the story unfold? What point of view as viewers are we put in, or made to feel like we are put in? How do the camera strategies make the viewer feel while watching?
- 2) **Placement of certain visuals/objects/symbols:** Are there props or design/backdrop choices that become symbolic in the film? What might that symbol or presentation mean or how might it impact viewers while watching the movie?

- 3) **Use of sound:** Is there music or sound that creates a feeling or ambience in the movie? Does the timing, repetition, kind of sound make the viewer feel a certain way in order to impact the viewing experience?
- 4) **Presentation of violence:** Is there a lot of blood? How is the violence overall presented? Does it seem as though the director wanted to make or avoided making a gory horror movie?

The answers to the above questions should help identify what the director was trying to portray as the locus of evil in the horror narrative. That portrayal, in Freeland's framework, can be where the societal message of the movie shows itself. Such technical aspects create a watching experience that, if effective, makes the viewer feel like they have lived in the world the director created for the last couple of hours. What world and representation of evil did Lambert create, and in that world how did gender ideologies play out or perhaps even impact the evil that unfolds?

Chapter IV: A Breakdown of *Pet Sematary*

Stephen King wrote *Pet Sematary*, published in 1983. What he has referred to as his “scariest story” was inspired by a century-old W.W. Jacobs short story. King might not be viewed as a classic novelist, but from a popular culture viewpoint, he could be called “the man” of horror stories. *Pet Sematary* in particular is the focus of my project because the one story has two narrative versions to offer for analysis: the book and the movie. King obviously wrote the book, but Lambert directed the movie and continues to work at least somewhat within the horror field. Recently, Lambert has directed *The Dark Path Chronicles*, a series of webisodes, for Farnet.com (Lambert). I share the fact that Lambert continues to work in the horror genre to show that directing *Pet Sematary* wasn’t just a fluke in her career; she dwells in the genre and, therefore, would have a voice that potentially could serve as a valid basis for arguing why more women should direct horror.

For those who do not know the plot of *Pet Sematary*, the following outlines the story. The Creed family moves to small-town Maine from Chicago. The Creeds are a family of four: Louis (father), Rachel (mother), Ellie (eldest daughter), and Gage (toddler son). They also have a cat, Church, who is Ellie’s sidekick. Louis is a doctor who takes a new job at a university in the small town. Upon arriving at their new home, the family makes quick friends with their neighbors across the busy road, Jud and Norma Crandall.

Despite Louis quickly realizing that the road by their new home is dangerous with a constant line of semi-trucks rushing through, the family’s cat still gets hit and killed by a truck while Louis is home alone. His new neighbor and friend, Jud, takes Louis and the dead cat beyond a “Pet Sematary” near their homes to a special Indian burial ground. They bury

Church, only for the once-dead cat to show up, living, breathing, but different, at Louis's house.

Louis has a secret. His world has changed, now having seen evidence that death might not be permanent. He was able to save his daughter from a broken heart by burying Church in the ground that we as readers now are to believe has supernatural powers of raising the dead. Saving lives is what a doctor dreams of, right? Louis has found a way to do it.

The busy road and the trucks on it (which seem to be monster characters of the story in themselves) didn't finish their destruction with killing the cat. A parent's worst fear comes true when the Creed's 2-year-old boy, Gage, gets just enough ahead of any supervision, onto the road, and in front of an oncoming Orinco truck. He is killed in a truck accident, with his family watching and his doctor dad just a few steps behind him in his attempt to save his son from the road.

After the funeral, the Creed family minus Louis heads out of town, leaving the mourning father home alone and with a bad idea. Burying Church brought him back. Sure, Church seemed different and smelled of death, but he was seemingly alive. Could he bring back his own son? Would Gage come back? Maybe he would be the same little boy. What parent wouldn't try to bring their child back? Louis digs up his son just so he can carry him to the burial ground and bury him again. And as he hoped, and perhaps feared, Gage does return. He is not the same little boy. He is a devious killer who kills Jud, his own mother, and tries to kill his father, too. The lesson goes beyond the idea that dead in this story isn't permanent; it warns "sometimes dead is better" (King 216), even if it is a dead child.

Louis sees that Gage is not the same child. He is evil, a killer. Louis kills his own son with drugs in a syringe. The book ends with Louis burning down the house where Jud's and his son's bodies are. He takes his dead wife's body, however, back to the burial ground and buries her. She comes back; that is the end of the book—a "Hello darling," with no action to follow, just best (gruesome) guesses. Based on the burial ground's effect on the cat and Gage, however, it is easy to assume that Rachel is no angel, or even human. As I will discuss later, the movie does fill in that aspect of the story, adding another death to the story.

Chapter V: Applying Freeland's Framework to *Pet Sematary*

Let's dig in. Freeland's mode of analysis cannot fully be applied to the book *Pet Sematary* because she looks at films in her philosophical work. As noted earlier, she analyzes the visuals of a film—the camera work, angles, and overall impact the technical aspects of a film have on the story and viewer—not just the plot and characters. Still, it is important to compare and contrast aspects of the book and film to answer whether Lambert contributed a voice of her own and perhaps furthered an empowering gender message through her work as the film's director. What differences stood out in her direction, and do those differences or other standout directorial strategies impact the original gendered message of *Pet Sematary*?

Overall, the plot of the book and movie are very much the same in so far as the main characters and chain of events match up on most accounts. There is no great shift in the adaptation to talk about from that perspective. There are differences, though, that give the movie *Pet Sematary* its own style and rhetorical impact. Below are examples of how the movie and book differ within the areas that Freeland's framework poses as important to discerning a gendered message:

Freeland's Plot-Related Questions

1) **Portrayal of gender ideologies.** Analyzing female portrayal involves looking at the representation of men and gender relationships overall. As Freeland puts it, I am to “study the messages that a film may offer about gender—either about what is taken for granted and accepted as true and natural or about what it challenges its audience to question” (*The Naked and the Undead* 14). Is this story clearly about a woman's struggle for power and success? No. We do not get to know or see our female character nearly as much as the male

protagonist. This story is about a man's struggle for control and acceptance and to live up to a male standard of esteemed bread-winner and protective father. That is a valid gender dynamic to analyze. Within the representation of the Creed family, there are various gender dynamics and societal expectations upon which to comment.

Lambert did not hold back in creating the squeaky-clean vision of a perfect all-American family right away in the movie. At first glimpse, the Creeds seem picturesque as a family unit. There is a handsome and healthy husband and a beautiful healthy wife. They have a daughter, son, and a beloved family pet. The Creeds ride in the almost clichéd symbolic family vehicle, a wood-paneled station wagon. Their new home has a wrap-around porch and a tire swing out front.



Louis is a doctor who has succeeded in getting a new job as the doctor at the town's college. Most would say that is a respectable position, one that would make a man and his family recognized within the community. It might even prove to Louis's father-in-law that he is good enough for his daughter. The portrayal of the family from the beginning is that they are truly a happily-ever-after story, a story punctuated with birds chirping, sunshine, and piano music. In various movie scenes, Lambert shows what might be called the stereotype of a perfect family. But by having those images sandwiched in with such gruesome, noisy scenes

of horror, Lambert's direction reminds viewers that perfection and happily ever after don't exist, not even if we live the dream of being married, having children, a car, and a home.

Because right down the hill from this picturesque house and family is the Pet Sematary, proof that death and darkness are just around the corner.



The book is written from the perspective of Louis Creed, so we get his perception of his life, which includes what his wife, marriage, children, and life's pressure are like. Louis is also the main character in the movie, but the book allows a reader to get a more thorough view on the world according to Louis. And right away, King fills us in through Louis's thoughts that he would like to run away from his family, change his name, and be a free man (King 4). In the book, we learn Louis's thoughts about his wife and marriage and being a doctor that make him less likeable compared to his character in the movie. He shares a strong, controversial view on marriage in the book that isn't in the movie: "...there is no such thing as marriage, no such thing as union, that each stood alone..." (King 56-7). He refers to his wife Rachel as child-like by comparing her to their young daughter, or foolish because of how they disagree on the matter of death. "For a moment, Louis had the crazy impression that he was talking to Ellie" (King 57). The book creates a greater sense that Louis believes he is smarter and wiser than his wife.

Multiple points in the book represent Louis as a man who feels that marriage and parenthood have tied him down, even castrated him in a sense. Both in the book and movie, Church the cat gets neutered. The book includes Louis's struggle in agreeing with his wife to fix the cat and how he thought it would "destroy something in Church that he himself valued—that it would put the go-to-hell look in the cat's green eyes" (King 23). The Louis in the book reveals himself as resentful and grappling for power within his marriage. The movie shows the matter of castrating the cat but not the drama the decision created between the couple or the internal struggle Louis went through related to valuing his manhood. As Mulvey and the other feminist theorists would likely see it from a psychodynamic viewpoint, Louis's character in the book is clearly dealing with fears of castration. The relationship drama that the movie presents between Louis and Rachel is over their disagreements over how to handle and respond to death. Rachel doesn't want her kids to know about death, and Louis thinks it is only natural to discuss such a natural part of life. By leaving out the relationship stress where Louis feels he is fighting for his manhood, Louis is more likeable in the movie. He is more believable as a loveable family man. Essentially, Lambert's version of Louis is a more positive one, and that portrayal diminishes a strong gender issue that is in the book. Lambert missed an opportunity to include a point of social commentary in her film when she depicted a more likeable, simple version of the story's protagonist.

Louis is so believable in the movie as a loveable family man that it makes the fact that Rachel's own father disapproves of her choice in husband seem less fathomable in the movie. The book gives a consistent internal monologue and family history that suggests Louis is a man who is out to prove himself. We learn that his father-in-law thinks his daughter married

below her status and took drastic measures to try to stop the marriage. King writes, “Irwin Goldman had offered to pay Louis’s entire tuition through med school. The price of this ‘scholarship’ (Goldman’s word) was that Louis should break off his engagement with Rachel at once” (145). Because the movie portrays Louis in a more positive and handsome light, it is easy for viewers to root for him, more so than in the book. Viewers naturally feel for Louis in the scene wherein this father-son relationship conflict most dramatically plays out, at his own son, Gage’s funeral. Louis and his father-in-law get into a fist fight at the funeral in a scene that is visually dizzying and emphasized with sadness when the casket is knocked down and the dead Gage’s peaceful hand becomes visible amid the inappropriate explosion of violence.



When Rachel's father yells at Louis at the funeral and blames him for the loss of Gage, Louis's face is almost child-like in its appearance. As a viewer, we feel for him. We side with Louis and feel the pain and disbelief that his face shows.



The movie's funeral scene notably differs from the funeral scene in the book. Irwin, Rachel's father, says nasty things to Louis in the scene, but it is Louis, not his father-in-law, who throws the first punch in the book. Again, this narrative choice creates a more likeable figure of Louis in the movie. What Louis's father-in-law Irwin says in the book about his disapproval of his daughter's marriage suggests that there is a gender-related theme left out in the movie that underlies the tension in the book. Irwin yells at Louis, "I saw through you, you prancing little fraud of a doctor. You enticed my daughter into a stupid, feckless marriage and then you turned her into a scullery maid..." (328). The book's version of Irwin suggests that he had higher hopes for his daughter than her becoming a doctor's wife. Therefore, are we to believe that Louis is less progressive in his thinking than his father-in-law? That is a possible theory, but taking the movie's version of this matter, there seems to be no clear tension regarding Rachel's role as a wife and mother. That portrayal puts a further positive spin on Louis in the movie. Rachel's character has less depth without the back story.

The rejection on the part of Louis's father-in-law plays into a defining theme of *Pet Sematary*: fatherhood. Right from the first sentence of the book, King introduces the gender-related topic: "Louis Creed, who had lost his father at three and who had never known a grandfather, never expected to find a father as he entered middle age, but that was exactly what happened . . . (3). The relationship between Jud and Louis is more thoroughly documented in the book, but Lambert successfully emphasizes that important relationship in the movie as well. Louis never says out loud in the movie that he admires Jud or wishes he were his father, but the way he looks at Jud and the feeling of intimacy in the conversation scenes between the two men leave the viewer feeling the bond of the relationship and how Louis looks up to his elder neighbor. Another way that the movie emphasizes the man-to-man relationship of Louis and Jud is by leaving out the book's character of Norma Crandall, Jud's wife. By leaving her out, Lambert had more opportunity to depict the relationship between Jud and Louis, further creating the sense that this movie is about the male experience, not the wives, or their marriages.

As the tragic and gruesome elements of the story unfold, we see things fall apart for Louis and him "failing" to meet his expectations for himself. During his first day on the job, he can't control the fact that his patient Victor Pascow dies while in his care. As a doctor, he could not save Pascow. What he likely thought would be a budding reputation of the good doctor in the community is off to a rough start. Louis heeds the advice of Jud and gets the family cat neutered so he will not go out on the road. Church still goes onto the road and dies. Louis could not keep the family pet alive. Later, he fails to keep his own child out of the road and from death's grasp. Louis fights to control the world around him until the end, by burying

his wife in the burial ground. His dogged attempt to maintain his family shows how desperate he is in his desire to be the kind of man whose family survives (the protector). Bringing the dead back to life is also a way for Louis to feel he's successful in what many doctors like him want to be successful in: saving lives. The theme and haunting truth in the book, "Sometimes dead is better," goes against what a man might value in constructing his identity, such as the principles that fathers and husbands protect their family, and doctors have the most important job of saving lives. If dead is sometimes better, then a doctor isn't so important anymore. The references in the book to castration (likely King's intentional way of playing with popular psychoanalyses of horror), mostly linked to the cat's medical procedure, further support the idea that this is a story of a man's struggle to identify and fight for his manhood:

Looking at Church made Louis feel sad. It was ridiculous, but that didn't change the emotion. There was no sign of Church's former feistiness. No more did he walk like a gunslinger; now his walk was the slow, careful walk of the convalescent. He allowed Ellie to hand-feed him. He showed no sign of wanting to go outside, not even to the garage. He had changed. Perhaps it was ultimately for the better that he had changed. Neither Rachel nor Ellie seemed to notice. (125)

The last sentence in the above quote underlines a consistent feeling in the book and movie that Louis is outside of his family. Overall, in the book and movie, Louis seems like he is alone, separate from his family, largely due to his struggle to stand out as successful, intelligent, and strong. Members of family, men or women, are individuals but generally hold a sense of connection and loyalty to their families. Louis isolates himself, more psychologically in the book than in the movie. Still, in the movie we get a vivid sense that Louis is separate from his wife, such as in the scene where he looks at her in bed after their son's funeral. Whereas many couples would mourn together, the visual of the seemingly crippled mother in bed, alone, creates the sense that Louis feels separate from her.



The movie visually portrays that Louis is alone at several points. Lambert fills the screen only with Louis's face many times in the movie. Often, it is the face of a man whose sense of reality is breaking down. His basis of understanding is being pulled out from under him. Below are images of Louis, one in which he is talking to his dead son on the phone, and the other when the ghost of his dead patient Pascow visits him in his bedroom.





The repetition of the similar facial visual is effective in making the viewer feel the terror, loss, and shock that Louis is feeling. With the frequency of this intense visual, Lambert puts the viewer in Louis's head. We are experiencing his terror, seeing what it looks like and what it might feel like when a man loses control.

The movie primarily depicts a man's struggle, but Rachel is not a silent, passive character in the book or movie; she stands up to her husband and fights for what she believes is the proper way to parent and talk to their kids. She married Louis even though her father disapproves of him. Louis knows that his wife is strong-willed: "If Rachel wanted to fret, she would jolly well fret" (38). She also fights in the end to get home to her husband and try to stop what her intuition is telling her is about to happen. She fails in that attempt. Some might say she is powerful in the end, as we suspect that she has returned from the dead to kill Louis. (This idea hinges upon the belief, though, that we assume the returned characters are the same characters as when they were living.) Lambert's representation of Rachel shows her as beautiful, sensitive, emotional, nurturing to the children, afraid of death, and attached to her parents (even though they don't like her husband). There is no sexual scene of her in the

movie unlike in the book (King 95), while interestingly, we do get to see Louis taking a bath in the movie. He is more available to gaze at in the movie than Rachel is; he is handsome to look at, too, and therefore easy to like. Rachel is not sexualized, but she is victimized.

Lambert shows the emotion that Rachel feels when she meets her dead son, who is about to kill her once she desperately embraces him. We do not see her get killed, but we hear her, and her screams sound similar to those made during childbirth. Lambert shows Rachel's dead body (killed by her dead son) thump down from a rope to dangle in front of her husband. The scenes related to the loss of Rachel are both gruesome and emotional. That depth portrays her as a definite victim of the evil in the movie.

While Rachel is a victim, her daughter Ellie is the story's survivor. Intuition is a common thread between the two main female characters in this story: Rachel and Ellie. Ellie has dreams that are actually premonitions. As a little girl, she has little power to do much with those visions, but the reader learns to trust Ellie's feelings. In the end Ellie lives. Doesn't who survives a horror story reveal what might make a survivor in the author's eyes? Ellie is an innocent girl, sensitive, who listens to her gut and her dreams. She is a talker and communicator, a point that is almost absurdly portrayed in the movie in an irritating way. Overall, King's portrayal of Ellie in the book shows her as more powerful than in the movie because we can read more characters' reactions to her and don't hear the voice of the particular child cast in the role. The book shows Ellie as "small but ferocious" (442), while the movie's portrayal does the same, except with an added layer of annoyance because of the actress's tone of voice and acting that may affect some viewers as irritating. One reviewer of the movie on Amazon complains, "Ellie Creed (the little girl) drove me up the wall. Her

constant whining and ridiculous dialogue drove nails through my nerves and she's on my list of most annoying characters of all time.” For the girl who lives and who, if listened to, could have saved her family, Lambert didn’t portray her credibly in the movie. A different casting decision or stricter directing would have made a significant difference in the girl’s credibility.

Rachel also shares in the gift of intuition in the story, both in the book and movie. The book depicts her inclination to trust her own and her daughter’s dreams and intuition more than in the movie, but the movie’s portrayal of Rachel also shows her active responses to her gut feelings and the desperate attempt to get home to stop the unknown but sensed terror that is to ensue. I won’t say that intuition is only a female gift according to King, as his book also gives Louis a gift of premonition:

He took Gage up the stairs, walking through hot slanting September sunshine, and as he reached the landing, such a premonition of horror and darkness struck him that he stopped—stopped cold—and looked around in surprise, wondering what could possibly have come over him. He held the baby tighter, almost clutching him, and Gage stirred uncomfortably. Louis’s arms and back had broken out in great rashes of gooseflesh. (31)

Even though the passage shows that Louis has intuition, he is the only character of the intuitively-gifted Creeds to contribute to the terror that undoes the family. Ellie tries to help stop the tragedy by telling the adults around her the messages she’s receiving. Rachel rushes home to try to stop the terror when she understands what her daughter and her gut are trying to tell her. Lambert shows instances of all three of the Creed characters getting messages, whether from dreams or the dead patient Pascow, but Louis is the only one we actually see who blatantly ignores such guidance. Even when Pascow’s ghost is begging Louis to stop and stay away from the burial ground, Louis walks right through the ghost with Rachel’s dead

body in his arms, intent on bringing her back. His need to control and fix things outweighs all other influence.



The above picture is from a scene where Louis is seemingly crazy, talking to himself (or Pascow) and believing that things will be okay this time if he buries Rachel in the burial ground as soon as possible. “He waited too long” with the others, he claims, as though it is a doctor’s diagnosis of why Gage came back as a monster. He is a man who believes he can fix the mess he has made, using his logic. He won’t listen to the warnings. He won’t look at the mess his need to control has created so far. Up until the dead Rachel returns to kill him, Louis’s desire to control his world and have what he wants sets him up for failure and disappointment.

2) **Representation of evil.** To find the social messages within a horror film, Freeland looks at gendered representation, but she also looks at the representation of evil in a movie. She emphasizes identifying the locus of evil in a narrative. Through Lambert’s direction, what is the audience left to believe or feel is the evil within the horror narrative that her film depicts? Lambert’s portrayal of *Pet Sematary* obviously makes the trucks out to be deadly, but

deadly isn't necessarily evil. Nature also has a mystic quality of being ever-knowing and powerful. But where, as Freeland asks, does the evil come from, and why is it compelling?

In the literal sense in the movie, the dead who return are evil. One might say that the source of evil is the burial ground. That evil only takes form, however, when someone puts in the great effort to climb through the woods with deadweight over his shoulder and bury someone in the stony ground there. The source of evil in *Pet Sematary* is the refusal to accept death and the refusal to relinquish control of the natural order. Neither failure nor death is the darkest part of life; evil is. Louis continues to let evil into his life when he tries to fix the unfixable deaths around him with the burial ground. The book differs from the movie in its consistent portrayal of the power that the burial ground has over people. That is a significant aspect to leave out in the movie since the source of evil could be identified differently in the movie versus the book. The following scene from the book gives the most telling account of the burial ground's power over those who know of it. Jud and Louis are talking about why they buried Ellie's cat in the special cemetery. Jud tries to explain that he didn't think Ellie was ready to face the death of her cat, but that isn't the real reason Jud introduced Louis to the burial ground: "You do it because it gets a hold of you. You do it because that burial ground is a secret place, and you want to share the secret, and when you find a reason that seems good enough, why ... Why then you just go ahead and do it" (219).

This conversation about the power of the secret doesn't occur in the movie. Viewers also don't get to hear the thoughts going through Louis's head about his motivation and lack of control regarding his choice to bury Gage in the burial ground. Viewers don't hear Louis thinking, "*Could I stop? Could I stop even if I wanted to?*" while he contemplates whether he

should go ahead and take his son from his proper resting place to a less permanent, more sinister one (438). By leaving out that great sense of power the burial ground has over those who visit it, the movie presents the evil as what happens when people challenge life's natural order. Viewers do not see Louis burying his son and his wife because he is being pulled by the force of the burial ground. We see him as a man who is emotionally distraught over his failures and losses and thinks that defying death will make things better. He does not listen to Jud's late but still honest warning to leave things alone. He walks straight through Pascow to try to bring back his wife and undo his mistakes. The movie's lesson is that trying to control death can lead to more disaster.

Avid viewers of horror understand what it means when characters let the evil in. For example, when Reagan from *The Exorcist* plays with her Ouija board, she theoretically lets the evil into her life. Breaking that boundary between the human and spirit world let the evil in, which is a similar occurrence as in *Pet Sematary*. The evil that Louis lets in when he defies the law of nature seeks to torment and kill him and those he loves. Jud, too, who is the reason why Louis ever went to the burial ground, is killed in the end. He has defied the natural order of things and taught his neighbor to do the same. This twist shows that even a seemingly honorable father figure makes grave mistakes. In that message, Lambert portrays that the pressure a man might feel to lead his family is heavy and can drive him to do unspeakable, dangerous acts.

Freeland's Questions of Technical Direction

This portion moves away from the general movie portrayal and into the specifics of the movie's technical tricks. First, Freeland suggests looking at how camera angles and technique can impact the rhetorical effect of a movie.

1) **Camera strategy.** Right away, we as viewers are put in the position of visiting the *Pet Sematary* graveyard. The camera lets us feel as though we are bending over various gravesites of lost pets, looking up and down at their grave markers and tombstones. We see no people, but a full graveyard that seems to be hidden, in the hissing, lush forest.

Our first visit to the graveyard comes to an end in a scene that is all about the camera angle. We are on a country road, as though we are standing right in the middle of it. We watch and hear a roaring, red semi-truck coming at us, and it literally goes right over the camera, making the viewer feel like they've just been run over by a truck. For those who know the story, this is an obvious foreshadowing of what's to come. This scene immediately creates a sense of dread for any viewer who has read King's book.



This “looking up” feeling is documented in quite a literal way within the film. Fred Gwynne plays Jud and is a very tall actor. Jud is the Creeds’ elder neighbor. He and Louis

have various scenes together, and in them, Jud is often positioned or filmed in a way that one gets the sense that he towers over Louis or is above him somehow. The character is supposed to be tall, but Lambert uses the camera angle to make it appear as though a character is looking down at another, or at us. With the camera shooting up at Gwynne, he appears even taller, like a wise old man looking out for Louis and whom Louis looks up to. This happens between Jud and Louis, and Louis and his daughter Ellie. It happens when the family's housecleaner commits suicide in the film. Below are a couple of shots of Jud and the Creeds when they first meet. The photo in which Jud and Louis are shaking hands wasn't edited to crop Jud out; Lambert's filming deliberately cuts Jud's full body out, creating the sense of a towering character.



An insight came to me relating to this technique when I noticed that the level difference seems to change/even out once Jud and Louis bury the cat in the burial ground. My theory is that those who look down and appear above us or others on the screen are portrayed as those who understand a secret that underlies this story about death. Here are images of Jud and Louis at the scene where they are looking at the dead cat.



After having buried Church, Louis is on more even ground with Jud because he has gone beyond a certain boundary that most don't. He now has a similar understanding that Jud has. He is in on the secret about the burial ground. In the following scene, we see that Jud and Louis are on the same level. This was right after Louis's first visit to the burial ground, as Jud warns him not to tell his family what they did that night. They share a secret and are on level ground.

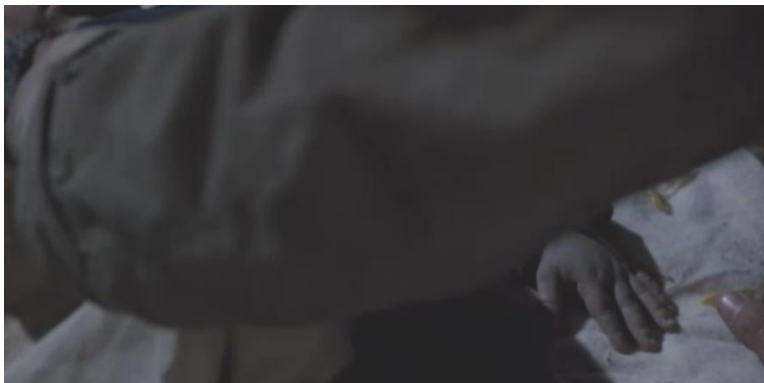


When the characters Jud and Louis have scenes in the movie together, the camera shots also tend to be of their faces, straight-on and close-up. That camera work creates the feeling of an intimate, sensitive conversation. An example is during the scene following Gage's funeral, when Jud is talking to Louis about why to not bury a human in the burial ground. Lambert can't include all of the thoughts and feelings between Jud and Louis as King does in the book, but the camera work was effective in creating a feeling of closeness and an evolving relationship.





Lambert adds an emotional element to the terror in the movie through her portrayal of dead baby Gage. When we see Gage's body after he dies, Lambert chooses to only show his pudgy baby hand. With us only seeing that, it is almost easy to side with Louis's idea to bring the boy back. His hand still looks like a fresh, doughy, innocent baby hand. Maybe Gage should come back. Maybe Gage can come back and be innocent.



The first skin we see of Gage when he comes back from the dead, however, is a dirty hand that has dug its way out of the burial ground. We see his hand maneuver out of the stony ground; we soon after see his dirty hands digging in his dad's doctor's bag for a sharp blade. Gage's hands aren't so innocent anymore.



During the scene of Gage's return, when he makes a deadly visit to Jud, the camera work creates a dizzying effect. The view of the scene is off-kilter and spins. We are made to feel like we are on drugs, or in an alternate universe, perhaps a universe in which death isn't permanent. The feeling is the same when Rachel arrives at Jud's house. We feel like we are in a carnival fun house. When Louis enters the house to try to find his wife (who has been killed and hung from the attic), the house not only feels like it is spinning because of the camera angles, but its appearance is changed, like it is rotting and decaying like the dead. It is an effective visual representation of what it might feel like for a quaint, beautiful life to turn dark and spin out of control. You want the dead with you? Then have the sense and smell of death all around you, too.



Lambert creates a world that feels foreign and sinister. She also does a good job in visually creating moments that ooze family, keepsake-moment-like perfection. The photo of the family home and vehicle that appears earlier in this section is an example of Lambert's depiction of precious moments. Here is another example, which is notable because of the action that ensues at the scene's end. Right before Gage gets hit and killed by a truck, viewers see the Creeds in picture-perfect moments:





When this scene of a family picnic ends with the following visual, it is extremely impactful. There are extremes of beauty, peace, and happiness, followed by such a sad, tragic sight of dead Gage's bloody baby shoe.



By putting scenes so close together that are so emotionally-provoking, Lambert makes the movie presentation of *Pet Sematary* an emotional roller coaster. The beautiful moments feel so beautiful and worth cherishing, while the ugly moments feel so dark compared to the bright moments. The extremes put close together create more extreme emotional responses. If Lambert sought to make her audience feel, the scenes she created do so intensely.

2) **Objects/symbols.** Repetition and reliance on certain objects and symbols is another of Freeland's areas of technical analysis. Lambert employs a couple of objects consistently throughout the movie to support the feelings and messages of her *Pet Sematary*.

Portraits

In Louis and Rachel's bedroom, portraits of both Ellie and Gage hang above the bed. We don't get really good close-up views of the portraits, but they stand out.



They are relatively large, framed photos of each child by him and herself. They look quite formal compared to child photos taken today and back when the movie was made. In the flashback of Rachel's experience with her dying sister, we see young Rachel run by a very large painted portrait of a child. Even though this scene is a flashback, it too looks like it doesn't quite fit the time. It looks almost like a renaissance portrait of a formally-dressed child.



We see more portraits on the wall of Rachel's parents' house, when Ellie wakes up from a bad dream, in which she dreams that Pascow tries to warn her dad and that something bad is going to happen (following Gage's death).



These portraits are emphasized again when Rachel is having a bad dream about her sister. The scene is dizzying, and the portraits are hung sloppily and unevenly. The messy arrangement of the pictures visually presents the feeling that the ground is shifting from under the characters' feet. Life's order is turning to chaos.



When Rachel arrives at Jud's house at the end of the film, thinking she is there to help avoid the doom that her daughter Ellie (and she herself) sense, we again are shown a portrait. This time, it is of Jud. With the audience now knowing that he is dead by this scene, the portrait seems to symbolize life lost but remembered. We also see pictures of Gage and his family flash one by one before our eyes, bright as though they are lit by sunshine, right after Gage is hit by the truck and when Rachel sees him in his zombie form.



The impact of showing the bright, happy pictures is strong in movie form, as they represent good memories and lives lived. Again, by juxtaposing such happy images with dark ones, Lambert's direction in this visual sense creates a strong emotional response.

In an interview, Lambert answered a question about what Gage is wearing when he returns from the dead. Here, you can see his appearance, including his outfit.



Her answer reveals her conscious use of portraits in the movie. If you look at the above picture of Gage, you can see he is wearing old Victorian-looking clothing. Compare the visual to the subject of that portrait Rachel runs by in her flashback to her parents' house, when her sister dies. Dead Gage and the subject in the old painting are wearing the same outfit.



In a web interview with *Inside Horror* Lambert shares how she utilized what she thinks was a creepy tradition in the past when people would take pictures of dead children, having them dressed up and posed. Post-mortem pictures were a way for loved ones to memorialize the dead. Lambert added this element of the portrait to the film. Her connecting the idea of the post-mortem photos to the return of Gage creates a sense of a timeless desire to transcend death and control it somehow. It is a reminder of the human nature to try to hold on to our loved ones, even when they are dead. Louis did not take and frame a portrait of dead Gage, but he went a sinister step further. He brings him back from the dead, and in doing so Louis creates a sort of freak show of his loved one.

Lambert's use of portraits in the movie creates a sense of formality, timelessness, and remembrance. Most people could say that they've seen an old picture somewhere and thought, "This is spooky. Why would someone put this on the wall?" In this movie, there are a lot of formal photos on the walls that create a haunting feel and send the message that people come and go, but these pictures are left. One day, we will be just a portrait, and that is not so bad, as the story demonstrates. Family pictures in the movie also intensify the audience's emotional response. A movie can only give a brief idea of what a family has been through. When the truck accident and zombie image of Gage are followed by images of him growing up and his happy family, the audience can more likely understand the sense of loss that the Creeds must feel—even how the viewers themselves might feel if something so tragic were to happen to them.

Trucks

Another symbol seen again and again in the movie isn't surprising given the prevalence of trucks in the book, but the huge, deafening trucks make a significant impact when they are present on the screen. Also, Lambert consistently uses red trucks. (Red itself is common in certain scenes.) The trucks are presented as powerful, scary forces in the movie. From a camera angle standpoint, we are always made to feel as though the trucks are giant compared to us—unstoppable monsters. Even when we might think that a truck would play a helpful role by getting Rachel home to try to stop Louis from doing something bad, Lambert warns us that this truck isn't good news either. Again, the truck is red, as is the lobster restaurant sign buzzing above Rachels' head as she signals the truck to stop. When Rachel steps up into the Orinco truck, a close look reveals that the truck has a number on it: "666." One's hope that this story might end well doesn't swell upon that sighting of evil to come.



3) **Sound.** The movie begins with credits, of course. The background noise is the sound of the wild in a lush forest-like place. It sounds like crickets, toads, wind, and swaying trees. There is a hissing aspect to the noise. There are voice-over children's voices, saying good-bye to their deceased pets, as though they were speaking at their pets' funeral services.

(This makes sense because we are looking at animal graves at the Pet Sematary.) A minute or so into the credits, there is music like a children's choir, a chant of "la-la-la" that grows to the volume of yelling and then builds into the volume of a loud semi-truck we see zoom onto the screen. The song that the kids' choir is singing sounds religious in its style, though no religious words are actually uttered.

Trucks are seen and heard frequently right in the beginning of the movie. Trucks play into the story in the book, too, but the noise level of the trucks when they pass on the screen is jolting, especially given the otherwise peaceful moments at the beginning of the movie. Movie form gives the trucks more power and a strong presence in the story. It also allowed Lambert to play with sound extremes, and, therefore, viewer emotion/response. Pretty piano music plays when the Creeds see their new home. The sound of the night at their new home is peaceful, a soft buzzing just perfect for enjoying a country night. When a truck enters the picture, it is loud enough to make one jump, and as a viewer to think, "Wow. I would not want to live there." This booming sound and threatening vision occur consistently throughout the movie.

Overall, sound helps emphasize two realms in this film. There is the ideal family life and then there is the realm of destruction (trucks), darkness, and death. Pretty piano music is common during the scenes of the beautiful family in the country. When a truck enters the picture it is so shockingly loud. Given the drastic differences in tone and volume between the happy piano music and the roar of the truck, the viewers feel like they've been falling asleep peacefully, only to be jolted awake by a boom. It is another way Lambert uses extremes in her on-screen presentation of *Pet Sematary* to elicit strong emotional responses from the

audience. A different emotional response that Lambert's music choices evoke is comical relief. There are two Ramones songs in the film. They are pop music and upbeat. One of these songs is roaring in the truck, with the truck driver singing and bopping his head to it, right before he runs Gage over. The second use of the pop music is when the end credits roll, after dead Rachel returns to murder Louis. By pairing pop music with terrifying scenes, the audience doesn't have to feel only disgust, dread, and sadness. The peppy tone to the Ramones music serves as a way to quickly bring the audience back to the idea that this is just a movie and, "Hey, this is a catchy tune!"

4) **Violence.** The first day of Louis Creed's job at the university is an important scene in the story. It really sets off the violence and blood that is to come. In the movie scene, Lambert does not shy away from showing the bloody patient, Victor Pascow, on the hospital bed. The camera is at bed level and zooms in and around the bed so that we as viewers get an all-too close-up of Pascow's fatal head wound. His head glistens with blood; we can nearly see his brain. You can even hear his insides dripping out.



We aren't looking at Pascow from Louis's point of view at this point, making the presentation of his wound stand out as a deliberate use of blood and gore on the screen. Pascow shows up in the movie various times, as sort of an internal, guiding voice or guardian

angel. Even in that positive role, however, he always looks gory, like he did on the hospital bed, with his bloody, flapping, sticky head wound.

Another source of the gruesome in the book and movie is Zelda, Rachel's long-passed sister who died of spinal meningitis when Rachel was a child. There are multiple flashbacks to Zelda in the story, and Lambert doesn't miss the opportunity to create an alarmingly creepy character of her in the movie.



We see the bones twisted in her back and the complexion of death on her grown, man-like face. Over the years, this has been the character that scared me most from the movie, not the bloody ghost of Pascow or zombie Gage.

One of the most important violent scenes in the movie (also the emotionally hardest to watch) is when baby Gage gets hit by a truck. While this sort of accident undoubtedly would leave a bloody mess, we see no bloody mess in the movie. Instead, we see only a tiny shoe with blood in it – the red of which stands out in the scene because of the similarly red truck and the red kite that tempted poor Gage to the deadly road. This image is shown earlier in this section.

When Gage returns from the dead, we get a pretty graphic view of how he murders Jud. We see Gage, a pale, growling version of himself slice Jud with a scalpel. We see how far he cuts into Jud's Achilles tendon from his hiding spot under a bed. We see Gage slice Jud's mouth from corner to corner and proceed to attack his once elder buddy at the neck, like a child zombie.



This scene is very graphic and disturbing, though not as ugly as it could have been. Gage's appearance alone is not grotesque in the movie. He does gruesome things and is violent, but he basically looks like himself, only paler and in dated clothing. This is notable as a book-to-movie difference, because King writes dead Gage's character as quite gruesome and foul-mouthed. The book's scene wherein Gage attacks Jud describes the returned boy: "Moss has fouled his white shirt. His fine blond hair was caked with dirt. One eye had gone to the wall..." (518). Not only did Gage appear uglier in the book's version of him, but he spoke truths to Jud. Part of the storyline that is left out of the movie is that those people who return from the burial ground know things. Gage, for example, tells Jud things about his wife (a character not included in the movie), and does so in shockingly foul language to come out of a toddler's mouth: "What a cheap slut she was. She fucked every one of your friends, Jud"

(519). It gets dirtier, but I will follow the movie's lead and leave out the dirty details. The movie has an R-rating and, therefore, could have had Gage's dirty language in it, but it didn't. Showing a less controversial, shocking dead Gage made it easier to remember that Gage was just a boy. If he had been shown in the movie as he was in the book, it might be more difficult to see why Louis would want his boy back. Again, the movie setup makes it easier for the audience to emotionally align with Louis.

The scene where Gage kills his mother also takes it a bit easier on the gruesome side. It shows no attack on her, only the sound of her screaming in terror. We later see what Gage did to her face, however, when Rachel returns to Louis. Lambert doesn't save us from seeing a missing eye and the dripping blood from it as Rachel and Louis kiss romantically in the end. Audiences have seen zombies before, but rarely do they get the chance to see them making out on screen.



There is a definite eww (but funny) factor to this scene—a scene that is not in the book. Lambert adds a new layer of violence and death to the story by letting us hear how Rachel kills Louis with a kitchen knife at the end of the movie. We do not see the murder, but we see her pick up the knife and hear Louis's screams.

Lambert didn't shy away from King's death count in her movie. She added the death of the main character. She used an ample amount of blood and gore in the movie, most notably in Gage's attack on Jud, Pascow's character, and Rachel's horrific appearance when she returns from the dead. Her use of blood shows that it can serve at least a couple of purposes. Blood can disgust viewers and appear so gross as to be absurd and comical, as in the case of Rachel and Louis kissing at the end of the movie; blood can also evoke sadness, such as when Gage's death scene ends with a bloody shoe. Her restraint in using blood for certain scenes, however, also shows that a horror movie can scare and create an emotional impact without it, as in the case of what Gage looks like when he returns from the dead.

Chapter VI: Overall Impact of Lambert's Direction

While the movie's ending is of Louis's scream as his zombie wife kills him, that lights-out moment is quickly followed by a Ramones rock tune and this important image:



Notice how the credit doesn't say "A Mary Lambert and Stephen King Film." King did write the screenplay and work with Lambert as she optimistically describes in an interview (Lambert), but this is clearly branded as a "Mary Lambert Film." So, according to the application of Freeland's framework, what gendered message did Lambert's film send to its audience?

Chapter IV's analysis of Lambert's movie shows that she did take some creative license and risks when bringing King's story to life on-screen. Lambert had a story, a thorough one, to work off of when directing *Pet Sematary*. King's voice is a strong and respected one within the horror genre, too, so Lambert was wise and fortunate to confer with him during her work on the 1989 movie. (She probably knew that King was not pleased with Kubrick's take on *The Shining*, which was released to theaters in 1980.) About six years after the book *Pet Sematary* had been published, there was a built-in audience for the movie when it was released. Lambert didn't stray far from the book with the actions that take place in the

story, though changes were clearly necessary to narrow a 400+-page book down to a 100-minute movie.

As is the case with many books-turned-movies, the movie did not have the thoughts of its main character to fill in the audience about the neuroses and history of the character and those around him. Louis's occasional thoughts of leaving his family, worries about castrating his cat, frustrations related to his wife's family, his father-son-like admiration for Jud, and his desperation to be respected for his services as a doctor, for example, are not shared in the movie. That is a lot of internal struggle to leave out, and those are struggles largely important to the gender ideology aspect of the story involving the value of one's manhood.

While a movie format doesn't leave as much room for thorough character development like a book, movies have other means of impacting an audience, including sound, camera effects, and the overall visual presentation of characters and actions. Lambert's camera strategy makes the viewer feel disoriented and confused when appropriate. In Louis's case, the dizzying world he appears to be in because of the camera at times suggests he is feeling out of control. Straight-on, close-up shots of Louis during moments of stress seem to signal to the viewer that he is feeling alone and stripped of the realities that he believed up until now. Those shots make us feel close to him and his terror-proximity that many wouldn't mind because of the casting of the good-looking Dale Midkiff as Louis. Lambert's positioning of the camera, Jud and Louis, and other characters throughout the film create a sense of who is looking up to whom without giving the internal dialogue of the characters.

The movie's use of silence, sound, and music successfully provides a soundtrack of a narrative where the peace of the perfect American family is devastated by the roaring reality

that, as bumper stickers say, “#It happens,” like truck accidents. (With Lambert’s apparent sense of humor, I’m surprised she didn’t have that sticker on one of the trucks that roared by in the movie.) The extreme contrast of sounds is almost humorous at times, which can be appreciated in a story like this because it is so dark. After we hear Louis get killed by Rachel in the end, for example, the end credits begin rolling with an upbeat pop/rock song. One’s uneasiness at the end of the movie is immediately lightened by the peppy music. Lambert knows the power of a pop song. After all, she is famous for having directed some of the biggest pop music videos for Madonna.

Lambert’s use of violence and blood in the movie also can work in a comical manner. A primary example of that is Pascow’s role and presentation in the film. This character is in the book, yes, but Lambert could have decided to make this sort of guardian figure look more like the angel he is trying to be. She sticks with the grotesque appearance but then presents him as a witty, dry-humored character. Somehow, a character with a gaping head wound manages to lighten the mood in the movie. Pascow has lines in the movie that aren’t in the book, such as when he smirks and says, “I’m not,” when Rachel suggests that she “...is sure things will be fine” for her family. Lightening the mood of *Pet Sematary* wouldn’t be a surprising goal, given King’s feelings about the story. The subject matter of the story was so dark that after King wrote it, he put it in a drawer for years, thinking it would never be published (King xii). Lambert’s use of humor, including the use of a well-recognized character actor like Gwynne in the role of Jud, makes the dark story more entertaining and accessible to movie-goers by inspiring a laugh here and there and a reminder that it is just a movie.

Does this say something about Lambert as a female artist? Is avoiding an entirely scary or sad story a woman's way to direct a movie? No, but it was the way that Lambert decided to direct *Pet Sematary*. She directed what King himself calls his scariest story. Few would say, however, that *Pet Sematary* is the scariest movie they've seen. Lambert creates scary scenes and tragic ones, too, but she did so in a way to not overwhelm the audience. The overwhelming sense of grief over the death of a child is a subject unlikely to fill movie theaters. In Lambert's interview with *Inside Horror*, she refers to "absurdist moments" within horror movies. She laughs at the idea of thinking of worst-case scenarios and putting them on-screen, almost as a funny, cathartic way to deal with a great fear. Her inclination to laugh about her work and what she likes about the genre suggests that provoking terror is not Lambert's biggest goal in directing a horror movie. She appreciates entertainment value at all levels, including the value of getting a laugh out of a gruesome scene, such as when Louis's dead wife returns and passionately kisses him while fluid oozes from her eye socket.

This story compared to other popular horror movies does not have the outside monster or villain that is easy to see and say, "Kill! Kill!" The monsters are in the physical form of the family cat, the baby son, and the wife/mother. A family sees their baby boy get crushed by a truck. It is a traumatic event, even from the seat as a viewer, which could make one reach for a tissue. I don't think film studies scholar Carrol would categorize crying from sadness as one of the chief, ideal reactions that helps define art horror. A primary subject matter of *Pet Sematary* is the death of a baby and that tragedy's impact on his father. It is a sad story. King knew it was a risky story, so much so that he demanded great involvement with the making of the movie. By adding humor, Lambert was able to direct a watchable movie about grave

issues that could inspire audiences to contemplate what they might do in Louis Creed's position instead of being so disgusted or sad that they'd get up and leave the theater. The comical aspect to the movie also creates an audience that laughs at Louis, the handsome but stubborn male character who would not just give into his grief and the will of someone—or a universe, that is more powerful than he is.

The most important question to answer is whether Lambert used her position as director to share an empowering message for women or regarding gender relations. Freeland's method can help to answer that question by looking at gendered representations in the plot, the representation of evil, and the technical standouts of the movie. Compared to the book, this movie has more consistent action and gore throughout. The traditional stereotype that women are not as attracted to violence as men, therefore, does not quite hold true. Lambert clearly sees value in gore, though not in all aspects, such as when the baby dies, how Gage looks when he returns, and in how we don't see him kill his mother. Still, she does go further than King did with the darkness by killing Louis in the end. The depiction of the family scenes as sunny, happy, and beautiful is strong. That stands out in the movie like it doesn't in the book, given the lack of Louis's cynical thoughts about the family in the movie. Therefore, the movie audience is left with a greater feeling of dread, shock, and loss in relation to the ugliness that the family goes through in comparison to the book. Viewers feel more sympathy for the main character, Louis, in the movie because of the various ways that Lambert aligns our sympathies with him. Lambert presents a good-looking, likeable, struggling family man in her movie. He is a man who has everything going for him but

wrecks his life by refusing to admit defeat and to live in passive acceptance of the power of something greater than him.

Another difference in the movie is the absence of Jud's wife, Norma. Norma dies in the book of natural causes and as a character before that has a sense of elderly wisdom to her. I argue that this relationship is left out in the movie in order for Lambert to better focus on the relationship between Louis and Jud. This directorial choice supports the argument that this story is about the men and their struggles. Leaving Norma out left more room for the men to talk and appear on screen together, drinking beers at the end of the day or digging into the ground together. Jud's character in the movie is a likeable one. He is huggably homely, so odd-looking that viewers have to love him. He towers over everyone and comes off overall as a guiding male figure in the story. His role in the Creeds' undoing shows how much impact a father figure can have on those who look up to him. That is a lot of pressure on a man.

Through her work Lambert creates a fear of losing loved ones and losing control of one's life. She could have focused more on Rachel in the story and differed in that way from the book, but she stuck to Louis and his attempts and failures at being the respected, powerful man he wants to be. In that sense, Lambert furthers a gender ideology message that King suggests in his original narrative. The narrative implies that trying to fit into gender stereotypes can set us up for disappointment so great that it makes us crazy. In Louis's case, trying to retain control over his life and family makes him cross major ethical lines. That is an important message for men and women to grasp: supposed gender norms are not necessarily based on ethics and can be destructive on various levels: on one's family, on one's mental health, and even one's soul.

Though Lambert's film does take the manhood theme from King, she also presents a different message because of the movie's depiction of the evil. This project uses Freeland's lens of analysis, which suggests that the portrayal of evil is where the movie's societal message most resides. The book shows that the characters are powerless once introduced to the burial ground. Louis was the victim of a primitive evil much more powerful than himself. Based on the movie's interpretation of the events, Louis looks like a man who simply makes bad decisions in the face of tragedy. In that important distinction between the book and movie, the men seem merely irresponsible according to Lambert. Focusing on Louis, Lambert created a man who was likeable, from his good looks to the way he played with his kids to the depth of emotion we see when he loses his son. We do not know the dark, unlikeable thoughts of Louis in the movie as we do in the book. The film suggests that his loss drives him to try to gain control over the situation. Putting it plainly, the book shows that Louis was powerless against the control of the mystical burial ground; the movie shows that Louis was powerless against the temptation to defy death or failure overall. Lambert's portrayal of that idea and Louis's mental and emotional unraveling would likely connect to viewers' real lives more than depicting an all-powerful burial ground. We like Louis. We would feel the hurt that Louis feels after seeing his son mowed down on the road. When that emotion we would share with Louis lets the murderous evil in, we realize that we, too, could fall victims to something so dark (as a zombie child) if faced with tragedy and the opportunity to control it. That is a scary thought, which makes for a scary and emotional movie by Lambert.

Finding a feminist message is not the goal of this project. It would be interesting and powerful to have found one, but it is an empowering message to see the strength that a

woman, in this case Lambert, can bring to movie direction. Her film does suggest that the pressure for a man to have control of his life is a heavy burden to carry. Louis's quest for control opens up a dangerous door to emotional insanity and the evil that can enter at a time of weakness. Still, the overall importance to identify within Lambert's direction of *Pet Sematary* is that she managed to make us relate to the undoing of the Creeds. She makes us jump, laugh, sweat with dread, and feel overwhelming sadness. The narrative she created was one for the masses and presents emotional, spiritual questions: "What would you do if you could bring back a loved one, and are there scarier things than death?"

Chapter VII: Implications, Limitations of the Study, and Signs of Change

That question Lambert's film poses isn't one that is only important for a man or a woman. It is a question that every human could ponder, worry about, and cry over. The question her movie poses, in fact, doesn't veer far from the origin of what some would call the classic horror novel, *Frankenstein*:

In 1815, shortly after the death of her first baby, Shelley recorded a dream that may or may not have had a direct influence on the plot of *Frankenstein*. On 19 March 1815 she recorded in her journal: 'Dream that my little baby came to life again—that it had only been cold & that we rubbed it before the fire & it lived.' Her anxieties about motherhood and the inability to give life may have led her to write the tale of the aspiring scientist who succeeds in creating a being by unnatural methods. ("Mary Wolstonecraft Shelley")

Shelley is a female writer of horror and proved with the timelessness of her novel that a woman's narrative is valuable across time, genders, and cultures. Lambert's *Pet Sematary* was valuable from an economic standpoint. It was successful in the box office, making over a reported \$57 million (Kroll). Her work on the movie was so successful that she was then tagged to direct the movie's sequel, *Pet Sematary II*. That movie is not based on a King book, and he wasn't involved with the project. Lambert says she is proud of the second film, though if she had her choice, the plot would have been entirely different. She would have focused on the first movie's "final girl" Ellie and her life after the dark loss of her family. Her inclination to feature a female character corresponds with the findings from the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in the Media. When women direct and write movies, there are more female characters in them (Dargis "Lights, Camera, Taking Action"). Still, there is the issue of getting a movie produced, which can mean that a writer or director sacrifices what they might have wanted to do in order to create the movie at all.

This creative hurdle that writers and directors face highlights a limit of this project. In Lambert's case she answered to a studio, but she also answered at least somewhat to King and his screen writing when directing the first movie. Therefore, her artistic freedom was probably limited in the making of *Pet Sematary*. She cannot realistically be credited with every aspect of the film I have discussed, and it is safe to say we don't get to see the full spectrum of her voice as a female director, given the business limitations she and other directors face within the industry. What I would really like to see is how Lambert's version of the second story would have turned out if she'd had more freedom. Based on her desire to show Ellie's story, her consistent work with the controversial female artist Madonna, and at least one of her less-discussed documentary films she directed about women in the U.S. Senate called *14 Women* ("Mary Lambert-IMDb"), I sense that Lambert has a lot to say from a pro-woman standpoint.

When I first proposed this thesis project, my intention was to decipher potential differences between the horror that men create in movies and the horror that women create in movies. This final project relates to that idea but strays for a couple of reasons. First, that would be a bigger project involving the analysis of more movies than just one. Secondly, I doubt and am uncomfortable with a theory that would suggest there is a natural, gendered difference between a man's horror story and a woman's from a biological perspective. After having been well into my writing of this project, an essay about the potential importance of female directors within the horror genre, I came across an article that excited me. It is so relevant to my work and my general interest in horror films and women's involvement with them. The title of the piece says a lot: "A Woman Directed the Scariest Horror Movie of the Year, Maybe of the Decade." It's affirming to hear expert, popular buzz about what I've

sensed is valuable for reasons of entertainment and female representation: putting women's visions of horror on-screen. The woman behind the Australian horror flick is writer-director Jennifer Kent. A *New Yorker* review of her movie *The Babadook* further supports my hunch that there is richness in a woman's work behind the camera in horror: "Let a law be passed, requiring all horror films to be made by female directors" (Parker).

Even though Kent is a standout in the horror movie industry because of her gender, she doesn't credit her gender as the factor that makes her movie scarier or better than others. She credits her perspective as an individual who sees and doesn't judge the "complexity" and "brokenness" in people who might carry out the horror in a movie. The only woman to have won the Academy Award for best director, Kathryn Bigelow, echoes that sentiment. According to *The New York Times*, Bigelow "insisted that there was no difference between what she and a male director might do" (Dargis "How Oscar Found Ms. Right"). If Kent and Bigelow are right, and being a woman doesn't change how a movie is directed, is this project a waste of time? This question brings us back to one of Freeland's reasons to read horror movies differently. She argues that past modes of horror film analysis assumed that gendered stereotypes of its audience are true:

To make very broad generalizations about 'male' or 'female' viewers blocks the recognition of significant individual differences among viewers that surely affect how they experience films. These include significant differences of social class, sexual orientation, age, race, and so on. (Freeland, "Feminist Frameworks for Horror Films" 748)

Just as viewers of any gender have different experiences to draw from when making sense of and responding to a horror movie, all directors, men and women, have their own backgrounds, skill sets, fears, and artistic natures that they draw from when creating a movie. Saying

through this project that there needs to be more women directors isn't saying that women directors are inherently better or have a female style to share with the world. It is saying that there is value in diversity in the entertainment industry, and by shutting out the female artists who want to create a horror movie, or any movie for that matter, the industry is engaging in discrimination and denying audiences of choice. Audiences are missing out on the perspectives of a pool of storytellers, whose individual experiences, including those related to being women, could be grounds for an entertaining and/or thought-provoking horror movie.

In my life, *Pet Sematary* serves as an example of a woman's horror movie that made an impact. It entertained me as a child, enough to see it over and over. As an adult, it still entertains me but also frightens me more on an emotional level as a parent. A female director is responsible for my viewer response then and today. By analyzing Lambert's work through Freeland's framework, I am happy to have given a female director, in this case Lambert, the attention she deserves when the industry she has served tends to leave women out of such serious talks of praise. Those talks are changing. The buzz surrounding Kent (though she is not a U.S. director), Bigelow's Oscar win, and the success in the past year of the female-directed *Selma* are a few examples of what is raising awareness of women's roles in the movie industry. The A.C.L.U. is getting involved by calling for federal and state investigations into the hiring practices of major movie studios. The director of the L.G.B.T., Gender and Reproductive Justice Project at the A.C.L.U. puts it simply and honestly: "Gender discrimination is illegal. And, really, Hollywood doesn't get this free pass when it comes to civil rights and gender discrimination" (Buckley). As the *Times* piece points out, employment laws are more lax for those classified as independent contractors, which is usually the case for

movie directors and writers. The overarching hope behind the A.C.L.U.'s involvement is that studio executives will feel the fear of negative publicity, change their hiring practices, and change the way that they treat, discuss, and pay women in the movie business.

Hollywood has not had much reason to change. From a financial standpoint, it is safe and successful for the studios to stick to what they know; that has meant sticking with the majority of male writers and directors who have consistently made them money. The A.C.L.U.'s call to action could inspire change, but so should a market trend specifically related to the audience make-up of horror movies. Past research and current stereotypes suggest that males tend to be the target market of horror movies. If Mulvey and other theorists are right about the supposed "male gaze," it wouldn't be far-fetched that more men would enjoy watching a scary movie. It was made with them in mind, after all. As the noted feminist scholars included in this study suggest, women shouldn't really want to look. Looking might be admitting that they are monsters themselves, are too masculine to fit into the accepted female ideology, or don't care that they are being negatively represented on-screen.

Women aren't just the victims and monsters of horror films; they are fans of the controversial genre. Personal experience tells me that women like scary stories and horror movies, me included. Lambert enjoys horror. Kent is a fan. So is Freeland. Shelley clearly found value in penning a horror story. An article about one of my most recent favorite scary movies supports the idea that the horror movie market is not as it has seemed or has changed. The article looks at ticket sales for a few recent horror movies, including *The Conjuring*. Upon release, the horror movie's audience was reportedly 53 percent female. That isn't a lone example of the apparent change in audience; *The Purge* and *Mama* both also had their

majority audience members as women. The article goes so far as to say, “Young women can make or break horror movies at the box office” (Cunningham). If women can supposedly “make or break” a movie genre, that puts them in an empowered position from a consumer standpoint. Now, that position of empowerment needs to expand to include more women creating the stories that their fellow female fans of horror and also male fans are watching in the theaters. My hunch? The added perspectives would create horror narratives and movie experiences that would result in a bigger audience for horror movies. Those newly-tapped perspectives would also likely reflect gender issues according to a more diverse population of storytellers. Maybe the prospective change would help horror’s reputation overall by leading to richer, more complex narratives instead of some of the clichéd narratives that can make an audience feel like they wasted their money on a ticket.

To further the conversation that this project begins, it would be valuable to analyze other horror movies directed by women. While there are not a lot of these movies to choose from, especially from within the U.S., there are others whose analyses could create a fuller picture of the value that female directors add to the horror genre. *American Psycho*, *The Slumber Party Massacre*, and *Jennifer’s Body* are a few examples of American movies directed by women that could serve as evidence for why women deserve more representation within the group of the industry’s directors. And though it is a controversial idea that I doubt (but is not beyond possibility), the movies might also show a woman’s tendency to favor certain portrayals of men, women, gender, and sexuality issues. Another point of research that would be a valuable contribution to this study and feminist studies of horror movies overall is market research that goes beyond ticket sales numbers. Instead of learning who buys tickets to

horror movies, it would be telling to learn why men and women enjoy horror and what messages they get out of certain movies. It would be telling to ask audience members what messages about gender and society they see in a movie, what they learned, and what they think that the director of the movie was trying to convey. That study might suggest horror movie-goers are savvy enough to see through certain portrayed stereotypes, as Freeland suggests, and that horror movies do in fact serve as bases of intellectual and spiritual contemplation, not just sources of gruesome thrills and societal problems.

Without having conducted such a study myself, I have asked myself what I get out of *Pet Sematary* and Lambert's direction of it. It isn't just a movie about zombies and graveyards. It is a movie about the darkness in life that can sneak up on anyone, even the seemingly lucky family next door. My knowledge of the book and interest in feminist studies inform me that, in my opinion, Lambert presented a more likeable Louis than King did. In doing so, Lambert might have missed a chance to more clearly show what happens to a man who isn't grateful for what he has and lives with a sense of superiority. Instead, she made it easy for all viewers to relate to Louis and, therefore, connect to the threat portrayed in the movie.

It has been 26 years since Lambert's *Pet Sematary* was released. In the past few years, there have been reports of a remake of King's popular book. No, Lambert will not be directing the movie. And, no, a woman is not going to direct the remake. Paramount has selected Juan Carlos Fresnadillo of *28 Days* fame to direct the movie, and the script was written by two men, neither of whom is King (Kroll). Compared to the recent news about female directors' success and the A.C.L.U.'s voice on the matter of employing female

directors, news of this remake feels like a step backward. Lambert's success on the movie and its impact on me won't be erased, however, and there is clear reason to not only hope but to believe that more women will have a chance to direct horror soon. Horror fans, films scholars, and feminist scholars can all help to demand diversity behind the cameras by recognizing the gap in the industry and the achievements of minority directors as well. The lack of presence is one problem, one that those outside of a studio have little power over. But, we can fix the lack of recognition of the value in women's voices in horror. I hope this project helps serve that socially-important purpose.

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